

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) In a vehicle having a passenger compartment, an instrument panel system comprising:

an instrument panel having an opening configured to receive one of a plurality of devices, the device received to be accessible by an occupant in the passenger compartment through the opening, wherein the opening has an area and each of the plurality of devices has an area substantially equal to or less than the area of the opening; and

a removably attachable secondary panel for covering a portion of the opening when the device received has an area less than the area of the opening, the secondary panel forming an intermediate surface visible to the occupant between the instrument panel and at least a portion of the device, ~~wherein the intermediate surface substantially surrounds the device.~~

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) The instrument panel system of claim 1 wherein the secondary panel includes an aperture through which the received device is accessible to the occupant.

4. (Previously Presented) The instrument panel system of claim 1 wherein the received device is a display for use in conveying information to the occupant.

5. (Previously Presented) The instrument panel system of claim 1 wherein the received device is a control panel for use by the occupant to control at least one vehicle system.

6. (Original) The instrument panel system of claim 1 wherein the surface of the secondary panel visible to the occupant substantially matches the surface of the instrument panel visible to the occupant.

7. (Original) The instrument panel system of claim 6 wherein the instrument panel and secondary panel are configured to meet so that the instrument panel and secondary panels appear substantially integral to the occupant.

8. (Previously Presented) The instrument panel system of claim 1 wherein the instrument panel comprises a plurality of openings, each opening configured to receive one of a plurality of devices, and wherein the secondary panel includes a plurality of apertures through which the received devices are accessible to the occupant.

9. (Original) The instrument panel system of claim 1 wherein the secondary panel is removably attachable by the occupant, and the system further comprises at least one additional secondary panel having a different appearance than the secondary panel, such that the occupant can change the appearance of the instrument panel system by replacing the secondary panel with the at least one additional secondary panel.

10-21. (Canceled)

22. (New) A method of assembling a vehicle instrument panel, the method comprising:

providing a number of instrument panels, each instrument panel having an opening, each opening having the same dimensions such that a size of the opening is constant for each instrument panel;

selecting at least one of a number of differing sized devices for inclusion within each instrument panel, each device being accessible through the opening and smaller than the openings so as to provide gaps between the devices and the openings, the devices of differing sizes providing gaps of differing sizes;

providing a number of differing sized secondary panels for covering at least a portion of the gaps, the differing sized secondary panels covering differing sized gaps; and
selecting at least one of the differing sized secondary panels for each instrument panel, the secondary panels being selected as a function of the gap sizes associated with the devices selected for the corresponding instrument panel.

23. (New) The method of claim 22 further comprising providing the selected secondary panel to mount flush with an outer surface of the instrument panel so that an outer surface of the secondary panel appears to be flush with the outer surface of the instrument panel.

24. (New) In a vehicle having a passenger compartment, an instrument panel system comprising:

an instrument panel having an opening configured to receive at least one display;
and

a secondary panel configured to substantially cover the opening, the secondary panel comprising a one-way light transmissible material such that at least one display is visible by an occupant in the passenger compartment when the at least one display is active, and the at least one display is concealed from the occupant when the at least one display is inactive.

25. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 24 wherein, when the at least one display device is inactive, the surface of the secondary panel visible to the occupant and the surface of the instrument panel visible to the occupant appear substantially similar.

26. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 25 wherein the instrument panel and secondary panel are configured to meet so that the instrument panel and secondary panel appear substantially integral to the occupant.

27. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 25 wherein the display comprises at least one cathode ray tube display unit.

28. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 25 wherein the display comprises at least one light emitting diode device.

29. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 25 wherein the display comprises at least one liquid crystal display unit.

30. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 25 wherein the display comprises a display unit for conveying information to the occupant.

31. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 25 wherein the display comprises a control panel for use by the occupant in controlling at least one vehicle system.

32. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 31 wherein the control panel comprises at least one touch activated switch.

33. (New) The instrument panel system of claim 24 wherein a portion of the secondary panel comprises the one-way light transmissible material, and a portion of the secondary panel comprises an opaque material, wherein the one-way light transmissible material substantially covers the at least one display and the opaque material substantially covers at least a portion of the opening.

34. (New) The instrument panel of claim 1 wherein the intermediate surface substantially surrounds the device.